

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 4368

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, KS

SUBJECT: CATHOLIC BISHOPS ISSUE APPEAL FOR PARDON OF
THOSE IMPRISONED FOR "CRIMES OF CONSCIENCE"

1. THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON KOREA ISSUED ON JULY 5 A SEVEN-PAGE PASTORAL LETTER AFFIRMING THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH TO SPEAK OUT AND TAKE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ON BEHALF OF HUMAN RIGHTS, THE POOR, AND OPPRESSED.

2. ALTHOUGH THE LETTER IS COUCHED MOSTLY IN UNIVERSAL TERMS, IT SPECIFICALLY APPEALS TO THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT TO PARDON ALL THOSE IMPRISONED FOR "CRIMES OF CONSCIENCE" IN ORDER TO RESTORE THE NATION'S MORAL AND PATRIOTIC SPIRIT. BY SUCH AN ACT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SHOW UNDERSTANDING THAT GIVEN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TURMOIL OF OUR TIMES THESE PERSONS ARE NOT ORDINARY CRIMINALS AND SHOULD BE FORGIVEN FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE.

3. THE LETTER FURTHER DECLARES THAT THE BISHOPS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY AND OBLIGATION TO PROCLAIM THE DUTIES OF THE CHURCH REGARDING THE PROTECTION OF ALL ASPECTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, BY THEY POLITICAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, OR CULTURAL. MOREOVER, THEY MUST EMPHASIZE TO THEIR GOVERNMENT THAT THE RESPECT FOR BASIC HUMAN
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RIGHTS TENDS NOT TO WEAKEN BUT TO STRENGTHEN THE POWER

OF GOVERNMENT TO ACHIEVE PEACE AND PROSPERITY. GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT REPRESSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LEADS TO INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND TERROR, FOR WHICH THE OPPRESSORS MUST BEAR A SHARE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY, EVEN THOUGH THE CHURCH ABHORRS AND CONDEMNS ALL SUCH ACTS OF INDIVIDUALS.

4. ACCORDING TO CHURCH SOURCES, SUCH PASTORAL LETTERS ARE RESERVED ONLY FOR VERY IMPORTANT PRONOUNCEMENTS. PRESSURE HAD BEEN BUILDING UP WITHIN THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY SINCE EARLY THIS YEAR FOR AN AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT ON EVENTS IN KOREA, AND PRESSURE WAS INTENSIFIED BY CURRENT TRIALS OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION LEADERS, STUDENTS, AND INTELLECTUALS. TEXT OF LETTER SAID TO REFLECT THE STRONG MARK OF CARDINAL KIM.

5. OCCASION FOR ISSUING PASTORAL LETTER WAS SPECIAL MEMORIAL FOR MARTYRED BISHOP KIM DAE-KWAN AND THE PROCLAMATION THAT 1975 WILL BE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LORD, YEAR OF UNIVERSE, YEAR OF WORLD, AND YEAR OF POOR, WHOSE MAIN THEMES WILL BE THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN PROMOTING JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND WELFARE. THIS LETTER IS TO BE READ IN ALL CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN KOREA. A FURTHER LETTER ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE TO BE ISSUED THIS FALL IS SAID TO BE IN PREPARATION.

6. COMMENT: WITH THIS AUTHORITATIVE, IMPORTANT, AND ESSENTIALLY MODERATE STATEMENT CATHOLIC CHURCH JOINS PROTESTANT NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN AFFIRMING THAT POLITICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MORAL ISSUES ON WHICH THE CHURCHES RESERVE THE RIGHT TO PRONOUNCE THEMSELVES AND TAKE SIDES. CARDINAL KIM HAS MADE IT CLEAR IN CONVERSATIONS WITH US THAT HE FEELS STRONGLY THE TIME HAS COME FOR CATHOLIC CHURCH TO MAKE KNOWN ITS VIEWS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ACCORDANCE WITH MODERN ENCYCLICALS. HE ALSO HAS TOLD US MAJORITY OF BISHOPS ARE IN FAVOR OF A STRONG STATEMENT, BUT END RESULT IS MORE MODERATE IN ORDER TO REFLECT CONSENSUS. IN ANY CASE, STATEMENT WILL BE READ IN KOREA AS CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT FOR REPRESSION AND DEMAND FOR MODERATION. CONFIDENTIAL

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